

What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
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The Shakers

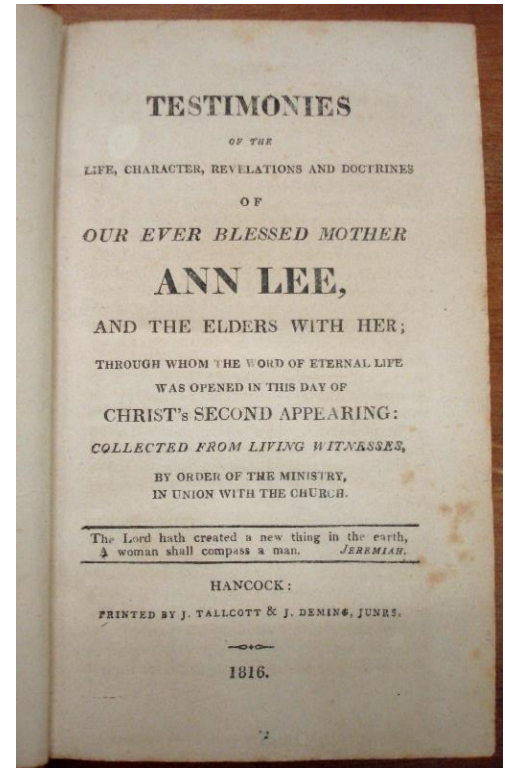
From <https://www.maineshakers.com/beliefs/>

Christian Vocation

The Shaker is called to manifest the Spirit of Christ to the world through their life and character, a world in which the will and purpose of God is largely forgotten. God calls by many ways, but all men and women, whatever their occupation or profession, are called to that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (see Hebrews 12:14). To anyone who knows the history of Shakerism, it is evident that God has used the very small groups of humble men and women who have constituted our order to build His Kingdom on Earth (see Daniel 2:44). Truly, He has "chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty (see 1 Corinthians 1:27)." To this day, we continue to build upon the same foundation found in our online school.

The Godhead

To Believers, God is the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent Great First Cause. It is He who called into being all things visible and invisible. He has existed from the very beginning of time and will exist into all eternity. God is pure spirit and as such, quite naturally incorporeal. Having no body, God has no sex in our human understanding of the term; yet being pure spirit He may best be thought of by man with his limited power of comprehension as having the attributes of both maleness and femaleness. This duality of attributes within God's oneness is one of the Shaker theological concepts most misunderstood by the world, yet it is not a Shaker concept, but rather one as old as the Judaeo-Christian tradition itself. We find it again and again in the Old Testament. It is to the writer of Genesis that we may attribute the first written record of the idea. In the 27th verse of the first chapter of Genesis he writes: "So God created he him; male and female created he them." The Shaker emphasis upon God's dual nature was never intended to convey anything but the fact that God, being pure spirit is possessed, within the terms of our human power of discernment, of the characteristics, of strength, power, wisdom, compassion and mercy.



Christology

We have already alluded to a marked degree of misunderstanding of Shaker views about the duality of the Godhead. Certainly there is no area in which there is greater, more fundamental misunderstanding, than Shaker Christology. If we may engage for a moment in the odious practice of labeling, we might say that mainstream Shaker Christological thought is adoptionist of the view that Jesus was not the Christ or the anointed of God from his birth, but rather from the occasion of his baptism by John in the Jordan. To the early Shakers as well as to other Christians before them the descent of the dove at Jesus' baptism symbolized the anointing spirit of God whose voice is heard to say: "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The Divine nature of Jesus, the Christ, was freely recognized by Believers. The adoptionist theory affected in no way their attitudes towards his birth or earlier life. We find in Shaker thoughts no attempt to challenge the virgin birth or any of the other miraculous occurrences surrounding Jesus' beginnings. These were to Believers a sign of God's prior choice of Jesus as the recipient of the anointing spirit. Jesus' life and ministry, his teaching, his sacrificial death became for Believers their holy rule. Unlike most of their contemporaries, they did not look for the return of Jesus Christ in the flesh. They sought his return in the spirit--the Christ Spirit--the anointing spirit of God, the spirit of love and truth. To Mother Ann Lee was given the inner realization that Christ's Second Appearing was a quiet, almost unheralded one within individuals open to the anointing of His spirit.

Mother Ann Lee, the Bride of Christ is not Christ, nor did she claim to be. She is simply the helpmete, Second Eve and first of many Believers wholly imbued by His Spirit and wholly consumed by His love. Mother's attitude toward her own role is related more than once in her own recordings saying, "It is not I that speaks; it is Christ who dwells in me," she says, testifying both to the indwelling of Christ and her subservience to Him. The closeness of her bond to Him whom she ever called her Lord and Savior is reflected by her having said, "I have been walking with Christ in heavenly union. Christ is ever with me, both in sitting down and in rising up; in going out and in coming in. If I walk in groves and valleys, there He is with me and I converse with Him as one friend converses with another, face to face." She solves conclusively the question of her own role when she remarks at Ashfield, "The second appearing of Christ is in His Church."

Confession of Sin

All future Shakers are required to "open their minds" through a complete and honest confession of all known sin that comes to mind since the days of their youth to God in the presence of His Shaker witnesses. This is not a confession to man, but a confession to God and His Christ, who has appeared the Second time without sin unto salvation in His witnesses.

Virgin Purity

All Shaker's practice Celibacy or "Virgin Purity". We live as Christ and the Angels do in Heaven.

Community of Goods

The desire to die to self leads the Shaker quite naturally to the pooling of goods. The Christian's task is to live in the present moment and not to store for tomorrow the bread that comes from heaven. Those who give up all material things for the sake of the Gospel learn by that same Gospel that they may learn to live without assurance of the morrow in joyous confidence that they will lack nothing. The spirit of Christian poverty is more than the absence of wealth. The New Testament never condemns wealth as such, only when a person's possessions come between him and God is there any real danger. A Christian who wishes with all of his heart for money to use selfishly is violating the spirit of community; a man who regards all that he has as a trust from God, and uses it for His glory is living in the true spirit of Christian poverty.

Pacifism

We strive daily to put into practical terms, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The central teaching of the New Testament is quite simply love, the love of God for man and that of man for God as evidenced in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. This same love was always and is today the very cornerstone of Shakerism. For us as followers of the Christ we feel we show that peace as pacifists. This does not mean merely refusing to bear arms against another, it also requires us to never feel bitterness, never to feel any desire for revenge, but always to seek only the highest good of every person no matter what they may do to us. We further believe in the practice of universal Brotherhood as well as equality for all, the Shakers being forerunners in applying this to our daily life over two hundred years ago.

A Faith for Today

Shakerism is not, as many would claim, an anachronism; nor can it be dismissed as the final sad flowering of nineteenth century liberal utopian fervor. Shakerism has a message for the this present age--a message as valid today as when it was first expressed. It teaches above all else that God is Love and that our most solemn duty is to show forth that God who is love in the World. Shakerism teaches God's immanence through the common life shared in Christ's mystical body. It values human fulfillment highly and believes that we fulfill ourselves best by being nothing more nor less than ourselves. It believes that Christian love is a love beyond disillusionment, for we cannot be disillusioned with people being themselves. Surely God would not have it otherwise for it is in being ourselves--our real selves--that we are most like Christ in his sacred oneness.

From <https://hancockshakervillage.org/shakers/shaker-history-faqs/>

The term **Shakers** is the commonly used name of **The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing**.

Shaker religion began with the early Believers in England who converted to this new Protestant Christian sect from several other religious traditions and groups, including the Quakers, the Methodists, and a charismatic, mystical group known as the Camisards (or French Prophets).

After their emigration to America in 1774, the Shakers attracted converts from numerous other Protestant groups, including the New Light Baptists, Presbyterians, and others sprinkled throughout the land in the aftermath of The Great Awakening of the 1740s.

The tumultuous early days of the Shakers in America were well documented in one of their first printed works, commonly called the Testimonies. Printed at Hancock in 1816, the testimonies asked older believers to recall their first meetings with Mother Ann Lee, and their subsequent conversions to the new faith she espoused.

The Shakers left their community at Hancock in 1959.

Why are they called Shakers?

The name Shaker was given to this religious group as a derisive term by people outside the faith who had watched the Shakers whirl and tremble to “shake” off sins and evil during their ecstatic worship.

Who was Mother Ann Lee?

She was the founder of the Shaker movement. Ann Lees, later shortened to Lee, was born in England on February 29, 1736, and came to America in 1774 after being persecuted for her religious beliefs.

What are the Shakers' basic tenets?

Celibacy, communal life, and confession of sin are the basic religious tenets of the Shakers. Other important beliefs are separation from the world, equality of the races and genders, and pacifism. Shakers believe that their founder, Mother Ann Lee, embodied the second coming of the Christ spirit as manifested on Earth.

How are the Shakers different from the Amish and the Quakers?

The Shakers, Amish, and Quakers differ theologically and in the way they live. Unlike Shakers and Amish, the Quakers do not live in their own communities. Unlike the Amish and Quakers,

the Shakers are celibate and do not marry. Unlike the Amish, the Shakers believe in full gender equality. And while the Amish reject most technology, the Shakers embraced technological advances.

Since the Shakers were celibate, how did they expect to grow?

The Shakers relied on conversion to grow their ranks. The early 19th century was a time of great religious and social upheaval in America. People were questioning traditional religious beliefs and social order, creating fertile ground for the Shakers' progressive thinking. The Shakers also took in orphaned children and raised them. When the orphans reached age 18, the Shakers gave them the option to stay within the community or leave for the outside world.

How widely did Shakerism spread?

Nineteen major Shaker communities spread from New England to Kentucky. At the height of the Shaker movement in the mid-19th century, there were an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 Shakers.

How did the Shakers govern themselves?

Two Elders and two Eldresses made up the Central Ministry, located at Mt. Lebanon, New York. They oversaw the spiritual and temporal needs of all 19 major Shaker communities. Bishoprics, administrative groups consisting of several communities located relatively close to each other, had their own leadership: two Elders and two Eldresses. They divided their time and duties between the communities under their care, and maintained the important connection between the communities and the Central Ministry. Individual Shaker communities generally consisted of two to six smaller communal groups called Families, with two Elders and two Eldresses in charge of the spiritual life of each Family. Temporal leaders on the Family level were Deacons and Deaconesses, who were in charge of the wide variety of crafts, trades and agricultural work pursued by their Family; and Trustees, who were responsible for their Family's communal business affairs and other financial and legal matters.

Did the Shakers pay taxes, vote, or serve in the military?

The Shakers did not try to avoid paying most taxes. They willingly paid the equivalent of local property taxes without seeking exemption as a religious organization. They sometimes objected to taxes that they considered unfair or morally wrong. Abstaining from politics, the Shakers did not vote, campaign, or hold office, except in rare instances. As pacifists, the Shakers sought exemption from military duty. During the Civil War, the great Shaker Elder Frederick Evans approached President Lincoln with a petition for exemption of Shakers from military draft. Lincoln granted the petition, telling Evans, "You ought to be made to fight. We need regiments of just such men as you."

What did the Shakers invent?

The Shakers were inventive people, embracing and often improving upon technology. There are many myths about Shaker inventions. Some are exaggerated truths; others are fiction. Because the Shakers, as a show of humility, often did not patent their inventions and improvements, it is difficult to say how many things they invented. Current scholarship indicates that the Shakers most likely invented the flat broom. They were one of the first to put garden seeds in printed paper packets for sale. They may have invented an early (but perhaps not the first) version of a circular saw. Authentication of many other Shaker inventions or improvements on existing technologies and items is debated and discussed to this day.

Are there still Shakers today?

Yes. A small but active community practices the Shaker religion in Sabbathday Lake, Maine.